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A BLACK CIVILIZATION

A SOCIAL STUDY OF AN AUSTRALIAN TRIBE

Revised Edition

BY

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APPENDIX IX

MAHKAROLLA AND MURNGIN SOCIETY

121 This section, too fragmentarily and too briefly, tells the story of Mahkarolla, a Murngin who was my friend. Although we had not seen each other for almost twenty years, we continued being intimate and close friends until his recent death. He was a member of a "stone age tribe" and I have lived most of my life in modern industrial America, yet during his life our friendship was as strong and enduring as any I have experienced with my own people. I think I knew him as well as I have ever known anyone. Most of this chapter will be in his own words; the part told by me relates incidents in our relationship which I believe reveal his mature wisdom, moral strength, and his fine qualities as a human being. Throughout the book I have striven for objective reporting and detached scientific analysis; although Mahkarolla's autobiographical sections in this chapter do conform to these criteria and the evidence was collected accordingly, I hope the last section about him will express what I felt him to be as a splendid human being, as well as express my love, respect, and admiration for him. Perhaps in any true account of a lasting friendship this is the ultimate objectivity.

The previous chapters present the Murngin world as a social system and as a symbolic order, while "Social Change in North Australia" (Appendix I) attempts to reconstruct something of the past of Murngin life, particularly the relations of the Murngins with the Macassar people. The purpose of this chapter is different: it is designed to let the reader meet a Murngin individual and *feel* what he is like as a human being. This chapter can render no claim to being an autobiography or a personality analysis. Rather it is an incomplete account of a man's life and his feelings about himself and his world assembled from field notes which were collected to understand not Mahkarolla but his society.

128 Throughout the text of this chapter the social references and social significance of his remarks have been indicated by placing page references to the text of the book in parentheses. For example, when he speaks of his experiences in the circumcision ceremony the pages in parentheses refer to age grading parts of the Djungguan ceremony and other appropriate social and collective behavior. Mahkarolla tells part of what he *thinks* he

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remembers of how it felt and what it meant to him as an individual; the text referred to presents the norms and modes of the society.

When I arrived in the Murngin country the men who had been on board the sailing vessel with me very quickly spread the news of my arrival among all the people. A number of the older men came to see me. Among them was a man who, I discovered, could speak a fair amount of English. He and I talked. I learned his country was on the mainland farther to the east; although he spoke English his thinking was native; and he considered himself, and was looked upon, as a person of consequence and authority among his people.

Across his chest and on his upper arms were ritual scars from self-inflicted wounds which had been filled with ashes. I judged him to be a man of about 45, possibly a bit older. He told me that his name was Mahkarolla. It was not long until we began our discussions, he telling me about his people and I telling him about mine. He became my best informant. We went out hunting together. We did together many of the things common to the daily life of a Murngin. He took me on my first canoe expedition away from Millingimbi Island to some of the other islands in the Crocodile group where a great ceremony was being held in honor of Bapa Indi, the python totem. It was during this first expedition that we became aware of our mutual dependence and friendship. Thereafter we were constantly together.

The next sections are told by him. I have translated his English, much of it pidgin, and his use of Murngin into standard English and have arranged what he told me in a simple chronology.

"When I Was a Little Boy"

I don't remember myself when I was very little. When I was a little larger I wanted to go to the countries of other clans and see places like Elcho Island and the Goyder River (map, page 40) and see how people lived and what they did and learn their language, but I was too little. All this was before I was circumcised.

I had heard my older brothers and some of the old men talk about Kopang and Macassar and the black men who lived to the west and who talked a language we little children could not understand (pages 453-458). I, too, wanted to go there and see those countries and ride on Macassar prahus which came to see us when the wind was from the East, but I was too little. Some of my brothers and some of the old men had been to those countries and a few of these men, while they were there, had Macassar women for wives. Charli Charli Sit-Down, my older brother, fell to the deck from the mast of a Macassar ship. He broke his back and still lived.

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159 We Wangurri clans-people are a bush people (pages 16-29, 42). We are very strong and very fierce and good fighters. All the coast people are afraid of us. Our country comes to the salt water at only one place on Arnhem Bay (map, page 40). It was here that we saw the Macassar. They brought [439] us presents of rice, syrup, calico, tomahawks, dugout canoes, knives, and gin. We gave them pearl shell, pearls, tortoise shell, sandalwood, and other woods they use for medicine. We helped them gather trepang (pages 456-458).

159 273 439 579 At these times, when the Macassar prahus took down their sails and masts and their men disembarked, our old men drank plenty, for it was then they got all the gin they wanted for the presents they gave the Macassar men. There would always be big fights. In the morning you could see blood everywhere and many people were killed. While the old men fought with the knives from around their belts and with tomahawks, clubs, and spears, we children used to sneak in and eat the food that they had left. We always waited our chance and rushed in and ran away again.

159 431 609 I can remember one day my father's giving me some tortoise shell and saying, "Mahkarolla, you go and give this to that Macassar man and make friends with him so that when he comes again he will know you, and you will know him, and you will have a feeling of friendship for each other." I did. The Macassar man talked to me but I didn't understand him. I forget the rest.

159 574 Another thing I remember when I was very small: I went with my father through the Gwiyamil clan country to the Wulkara people for a corroboree. This is the path our ranga took in the stories we know about him, and those people are also Sand Fly people (pages 33-35), just as we Wangurri are.

159 857 Before we were circumcised we little boys played spear-fighting games, talked about sneaking up and killing a man, and we threw clay mud balls at each other. When it was hot in the rainy season we swam in the sea (pages 125-128).

Later we played being grown men and women with the little girls. We made little fires in the sand beaches. We went out just like our fathers and pretended to spear fish, and the little girls went into the bush and brought home bush food (vegetable food). We made little bark huts just like our fathers' and mothers'. The girls would come in and lie beside us as our wives and we were their husbands.

When we were little boys, others boys who were a little bit bigger joked us about the wives we were going to marry. This made me feel very ashamed. Little girls joked the same way. They also became ashamed. When we got bigger we weren't ashamed any more. We were glad.

159 867 I think I always knew it was wrong to "play with" a girl of the Yiritcha

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moiety because I always knew I was Yiritcha (pages 29-33). I just knew it. 159 867
No one told me. I cannot remember anyone telling me, I just knew it. Yiritcha people belong to my half of the people, and I knew it was wrong to play husband and wife with my sister, even though I was a small child and knew nothing. I talked to my sister then. Now I never talk to my sister (pages 65-67). I never do any of those things with my sister. I am just the same with her as I am with my Mokul Rumeru and my Momelker (pages 103-104).

Long before I was circumcised I was told to stay away from my Mokul [Mother-in-law] and her mother. They were taboo. I was told by my father and my mother and the other old people that I could not speak to them and that I must not look at them. I must never touch them, and I could not use their names. If I wanted to give them anything I must give it to another man or woman to give to them, but never could I give anything to them from my hand to theirs. If I went near them or did any of these things, the old people told me, I would get a sore in my groin and a very large swelling in that place and I would become very sick. When I was very little I walked around anywhere, and I touched anybody, and I did as I pleased, and I went near these taboo people because I didn't know any better.

I didn't know anything at that time. I thought women were just the same 159 864
as men. I did not think at all. By and by, when I had grown a little, I saw that the little girls were different when I looked down at them. I thought then that they were just like my mother. About this time I noticed that 159 867
some of the little boys looked different when I looked at them there. They had no foreskin on the penises, but I had a foreskin just as I had when I had come out from my mother. At first I did not say anything—I was ashamed. By and by I asked one boy why he was like that and he said he was circumcised. I asked him how it was done. He said he did it. He was lying to me because the old men had told him they would kill him by magic if he told the truth to us small boys. We could not know this until we had been circumcised ourselves. I did not know he was lying, but I felt maybe he was not telling me the truth.

When we little boys and girls played together we did it by ourselves so 159
that no one could see. We were ashamed if we thought older people were 864
watching and listening to what we were doing. We said things to each other about sexual intercourse and other sexual things which we did not understand. The other day I heard a little girl say to the little boy she was playing with, "You are my husband. I am your wife. Come have sexual intercourse with me." That was the kind of things we said to each other. I laughed because I remembered when we said those things and we did not know what they meant. She said it because it was part of their game. But

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159 when we grew larger we did find out and some of us became sweethearts.
864 Even today these old sweethearts still get food from us and we get food and presents from them (pages 74-92).

159 When I was a little bit bigger, after I was circumcised, we little boys
857 always made fish spears and we always carried them with us. We hunted
868 birds and fish with them. Sometimes we hit a bird, and often we caught small fish. We learned then to carry our baskets over our shoulders, under our arms, just like grown men do, just as our sisters learned to carry their baskets over their foreheads.

159 When a boy gets a little bit large and he has been circumcised, he sleeps
591 with other boys and the unmarried men and he stays away from his father's and mother's camp most of the time. It is no good for young people around where married people are. They learn too much. They see women too much. Sometimes you see these boys sitting down in a camp with the women. They are not learning the way to live properly. It is all right when they play around in their own camp and they eat there and sleep there (page 127).

MAHKAROLLA'S CIRCUMCISION

159 One day I went with an older brother down through the Barlamomo
852 country to Blue Mud Bay to invite them all to come up to my country for my circumcision (pages 259-290).

When I came back from the Blue Mud Bay country many of our relatives came with me. They brought many presents. My father took me and gave me to a man who painted me very pretty with many colors. I was afraid but I tried not to show it. I looked like I did not care what happened. I was a little bit pleased, too. I was afraid because I did not understand what was going to happen to me. I did not know it then, but my father had given that man a present to paint the picture of my totem well on my breast and belly, and also to put some of my totems (symbols) on me to get me ready (page 262).

When the old men painted me for my circumcision ceremony they put kangaroo teeth stuck in beeswax on a string and tied it around my forehead. The teeth hung on my forehead over my nose.

When some of the old men were away I asked some of the little boys what they were going to do, and one of them said he thought they were going to cut me. I was very frightened. My father had taken me a little way away from the main camp where the women stay and had brought me part way to the sacred camp of the python, where only men can go. This also frightened me.

When I heard the little boys say the old men were going to cut me I sneaked away from the little boys' camp and ran to my mother. It was

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nighttime when I heard this and I thought if I went to my mother she would hide me and I could sleep. I asked her to hide me under her sleeping mat. She put me there but said I would have to be cut. She said all men had to have that done to them for it was like that (page 261). 159 852

Next day, when it was time for me to be circumcised, my galles, who were big men, caught me and took me from my mother. All the women got spears and they pretended to fight the men. They threw spears without spear-throwers. They did not hurt anybody. It was a little bit like fun. I thought, "Those women are fighting for me." It made me feel good. The men made a ring around me and took me. They chased the women away. I was taken to the sacred ground of the great Bapa Indi, where the men held their ceremonies to celebrate the fact that they were Dua (pages 29-33).

I thought I was going to see a real python. When I stood and looked at the leaves and piled up earth that surrounded the dance ground I thought that big snake would come out there. I stood at the head of the ground with another little boy who was also going to be circumcised and two old men stood beside us (pages 265-266). Two dancers came. They were all painted, but I was too little and I did not know what their paint meant. One old man said they were Wongar kangaroos (pages 271-274). He also said, "When you get through with this ceremony you can't talk any more to any of your people except your father and your mari and to the little boys." He said if I did talk a little bird which was all the same as a spirit would listen to me and come and tell all the old men and the old men would kill my mari and my mother and kill me. They would have a bad medicine and do it. [867]

All the dancers who come out in the circumcision ceremony appeared. While they came the two old men told me the story of the two Wawilak sisters who made the world and our life the way they are today (pages 250-259). In one of the dances several old men ran at us little boys, holding spears in their spear-throwers and pretending they were going to kill us with them. We were very afraid but we did not show it. We stood still. Then they told us that this was the way Wangurri people were and this was the way our fathers and our grandfathers had always acted and that they had never been afraid and they always had been great fighters. After this they took us away, back to the bush which separated the men's ceremonial ground from the main camp of the women. Some old men stayed with us. When we had been there a few moments we could hear the roar of Yurlunggur, the great Father Python of the Dua moiety (pages 265-266). He seemed very near. I tried not to tremble, but I was very afraid. The old men told me he was more than a real snake. He was a spirit. The old 159 852 869

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159 852 869 men told me he was the great Father Python who had come in the spirit and was made true for us black men at this ceremony for him. They said when I grew older I could see him, but that now I was too little and that my eyes were not strong enough and that it took much "power" to look at him like old men must have when they see him.

159 852 After a little while I heard all the men calling out with some strange sounds. I knew later that they were using the cry of a wedge-tailed eagle. They were beating their spears with their spear-throwers. They came nearer and nearer and finally two of them picked us up and put our legs around their necks and over their shoulders. We rode on their backs as we marched to the main camp where the women were. When they carried me on their shoulders I thought they were sure to kill me. I was more afraid. I held my head down and shut my eyes. I thought first, "Maybe they will kill me," then I would think, "No, maybe they are going to burn me." I would think back and forth like that. When we got in the women's camp they took me down from off the man's shoulders and one man lay down on the ground and I was placed on top of him and some other men held me with my legs spread apart so that I could not move. I cried and cried. Just before they did this one old man gave me a drink of water. When I started crying one of the men put a small basket in my mouth for me to bite on and so the women couldn't hear my crying. All the men had surrounded me and I was in the middle of a circle. I could hear the women crying while they danced around our circle (pages 286-288).

[304] One man took a stone spear and broke it and took a small piece of it and cut the skin from off the head of my penis. Then I was picked up and a man ran with me back to the men's ground. I was crying and crying, for I was very afraid and the cutting had hurt me. When we got near the men's ground he put me down by a small fire and took some water and washed where I had been cut and took his hands and put them over the fire and heated them and placed them over my penis. This made me feel much better. I was thirsty. I asked for water. The old men said that while we had been out in that ground the whole world had been covered with salt water again because the tide had come in and covered everything. There was no drinking water now, he said. They told me this for one day and would not let me drink. All that day I went without water; next day they gave me some (pages 287-288).

159 783 852 A day or two after I had been cut some old men took me, with my father, to the men's ground. When we got there I found they had two logs laid down and two more laid across them. They were placed over some stones that were as hot as fire. A big fire had been built over these stones to make them hot, before the logs were placed on top of them. All the old men were

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sitting around singing. I was afraid again because I did not know what they were going to do. I did not cry. I just looked down and said nothing. They told me to stand up on the logs and squat down over the hot stones. An old man stood by. He had some lily leaves that had been soaked in water. He threw the lily leaves on the hot stones. Steam came up all around me. This went inside my anus and into my body and all through it and came out my mouth. That is what those old men told me.

They told me it would make me very strong and clean me all out and make me all the same as the power song. I know now they did this for this reason and so that I wouldn't be greedy and could go a long time without food and without drink.

Two or three old men warmed their hands over the fire and put them to my mouth and talked to me. They said, "You are no longer a baby. You are growing up and going to be a big man. You must not swear at anybody. You must not lie. You must not chase after other men's wives."

Another old man rubbed my navel. He said, "This will make you very strong and you won't get hungry quickly and you won't try to eat too much food." One old man sat beside me. He picked up a piece of kangaroo. He said, "This one is not kangaroo. What do you call this one?" Another old man sat on the other side of me and whispered the power name of kangaroo in my ear. I called out the secret name of this food when I swallowed it. When I said this, all the old men who were sitting around in the men's chorus sang out, "Yai! Yai!"

That first old man then named all the kinds of foods that grow in the bush and that are game and that are fish, and he said this same thing to me and that other old man told me their power names. All the time the leader beat his singing sticks and sang the sacred names of these foods. This was the first time I had ever heard the secret language which only we men understand. No women hear these things. Women are profane and they would spoil them. These are things only for men to know. Children and women are not strong enough (pages 288-290).

He Grows Up—A Foreign Woman Seduces Him

My father and I went to visit my nati's people at Elcho Island (map, page 40). I was larger then, and my circumcision had been a few dry seasons in the past. Some Macassar men were there, and they said that the white men were getting very mean and cheeky and that they were going to stop the Macassar men from coming. They said that this was their last voyage and they would never come again. They said that white men were all the same as animals and that they were big men and had hair on them and vere very fierce and they just killed people because they liked to kill.

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159 They said that white men always stole all the women of a people they
648 visited, and when the people complained they killed them. Our old men believed them. We were all very afraid. We were sorry that the Macassar men were not coming again, for they brought us tomahawks and calico and other things we liked (pages 451-470).

One day after they had gone we saw out in the middle ocean the sail of a big boat. My older brother said he would go out and look. He was always very curious and wanted to see things for himself. He was sent out by the old men, who stayed back, for old men are like that. The old men thought he would be killed, but all the time I thought, "No, white men have fathers and mothers and wives just the same as black men." I thought a minute. I got in the canoe with my brother. We rode out to the lugger. A man threw down a rope for us to come up on. Everybody in our canoe jumped, for we thought something was going to kill us. When we saw it was a rope we were a little bit ashamed and we laughed. We crawled up the rope and went on deck.

There was a black man on board. He belonged to the tribe of Cape Don. He was called Cape Don Tommy by the white men on board. We did not know him then, but because he was a black man and he looked happy we felt better. He talked Macassar. We could talk Macassar, too. We did not
[198] talk his language, and he could not talk ours. Macassar was always the language black men talked when they could not understand each other's language. There were a white man and some Malays on board. This white man wanted some tortoise shell and pearls. We all talked in our own language and they could not understand us. My brother said that when it came night we would all sneak on board and steal all the things that this white man had. The white man, when he saw me, liked me. The Malays also liked me. They told Cape Don Tommy to ask me if I would come with them and be their cabin boy. I was a little bit afraid, but always when I was a little boy I wanted to go places and see other people. I said I would go. My brother was very afraid and wanted me to come with them, but I stayed on the ship and they went away. My brothers came after me and tried to catch me. They thought that white man was going to shoot me.

159 Our sailboat went on as far as the Crocodile Islands. When we got there I was very sorry I had gone with them, for I did not know what they were going to do with me. We put down our anchor. We got in the dinghy and were going ashore. I cried and cried. There was a Chinaman on board who was their cook. He liked me and he gave me food. We left the islands and went out to Junction Bay. I found some pelican and sea gull eggs and ate a lot of them. I asked if black fellows lived there. I did not know then that black men lived all around this seacoast. I looked around and tried to find

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some. I thought to myself, "I'll talk a little Macassar to them, and I'll run away from these white men and go back home." I felt very sorry I had left it. I was afraid maybe that these white men would take me some place and kill me. Then I thought, "No, they won't." I was afraid. I don't know why now. 159

I hunted for some people, but I didn't find any. I came back from the bush singing a mourning song (pages 413-415). It said how sorry I was and how unhappy, and it is the song we sing when people are dead or when they have gone away and we want them to come back. I got on the boat and went on with these people, for I could not stay by myself. We went on past Cape Don, but there was no lighthouse there then. We went to Port Darwin, where I found many tribes. They had not all died. They were most of them alive then. [533]

We stayed there a little while and came back to the country of Cape Don Tommy. I was still very young and I had no beard and no pubic hair when we arrived there. I stayed there two rains. When I left I had both pubic hair and a beard. When I came there I did not know their language. When I went away I spoke it. One night one of their women made a large bark hut and fixed a fire in front of it and put paper bark on the ground to lie on. She told me I could go inside. I went inside, thinking there would be another boy with me.

When I went into that hut that woman crawled on top of me and put her legs around mine so I couldn't move. I was still young. I did not know what she wanted. I thought she was holding my legs that way and someone would come up and spear me. I could not talk her language and she did not understand Macassar. The girl was young and had young breasts on her like this [he cupped his hands over his nipples]. I wriggled loose from her and ran outside. I found Cape Don Tommy. I said to him, "What does that woman want?"

That girl was his half-daughter. He said, "I think she wants you for a sweetheart."

I said, "I don't like that. In my country we don't make sweethearts that way. We don't make sweethearts before everyone in the middle of the camp. Boys and girls sneak away from the camp and do it there so that the old people can't see us and we won't be ashamed." [836]

He said, "Don't be afraid of her husband. He won't fight you. That is a custom here. He is away now. When he comes back you give him presents, and he will know that you belong to another country, and that our people took you from there, and we must see that you have a sweetheart just as we must see that you have plenty of food."

I slept, though, with the other boys that night. Next morning I was sit-

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159 ting by the fire when three young women came by. One of them was the girl. She said, "Come on with us. We are going to look for honeybee nests."

I did not know what to do. They were going to look for honeybee nests all right, but they wanted me to come along for other reasons. People were about when they asked me. I was ashamed not to go, and I was ashamed to go. I went. When we walked away, one of them saw some honeybees flying and we followed them to their hive in a hollow tree trunk. One of them cut a long forked stick and put it on the side of the tree as a ladder. They got up and cut away at the side of the tree. By and by they found the honey and brought it to the ground. When they did this they called for me to come and help eat it.

I like honey very much, but I was ashamed to be with those three women, and I was afraid of what they might do. While all of them were down on their hands and knees eating the honey I sneaked away and hid behind a big tree that had fallen down. They looked up and called for me, and they tried to find me, but they couldn't. I lay there very quiet.

That noon I came into camp. There was an old man there. He called me over and said he wanted to talk to me. He was very quiet, and he seemed kind, and I believed he wanted to help me.

"Why did you run away from that girl this morning?" he said. "She likes you. Don't be afraid. No one will hurt you. Tonight when she comes to her hut she will want you to go with her. You go in with her." he talked Macassar.

I thought then, "These people are all right. They won't hurt me. I'll sleep with her tonight." But I was still ashamed and a little afraid. Everything was all different from the way it was in my country. I had never been with a woman before, and this also made me ashamed.

That night I watched people. I could not understand what they said so I watched. If a man picked up a spear I held my spear. If men picked up spears and walked around I followed them with my eyes. Under my half-closed eyelids, as I sat by the fire, I watched the girl to see what she would do. I saw by the way she acted she wanted me, but I was still afraid and ashamed, and we do not make sweethearts like that in my country.

I sneaked away from the camp and went out to the beach and sat down in the canoe. There was a boy there. I pointed to the canoe and then to my tongue and said by sigr language, "What do you call this?" [201]

He told me. I pointed to a stone. He told me. We did this for a while. At last I hit the thigh of my right leg and pointed to my pudenda to ask him what he called wife. He told me. I was very surprised to find that they had the same word for wife as they did for husband. That seemed to me very silly, for we have a word for each in my country.

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I was doing all this to learn the language and find out if it was all right for me to live with that girl. We went back to camp that night, but I slept with all the other unmarried men. In the morning all the young men laughed at me. I couldn't tell what they said, but I knew by the signs they made they were making a fool out of me for not sleeping with that girl.

Cape Don Tommy talked to me again. "She is my daughter. Don't be afraid of her." That night I went into her hut. She came in and lay beside me. I was very ashamed. I tried to lie quiet, but I shook all over.

She was a young girl. Maybe I was no older than she, but she had had sweethearts, I think, before this, from the way she acted. I had never had a woman before this. It was my first time.

She tickled me and made me laugh. She rubbed her fingers all over my body, being careful to keep away from my penis. This made me feel better and did not frighten me. I laughed. She pushed her stiff index finger into my stomach. After this I lost my fear and I had intercourse with her.

In the morning she took me with her. She told me by sign language she was going to teach me her language (pages 515-518). I wanted to learn it very much. That day she taught me how to say mangrove tree and barrimundi and palm fruit and all other things women gather for food. She did this as we walked along. I lived with her all the time I was in her country, and she taught me the language, and I can speak it now. When I went with the same white man, who had come back with his lugger, to Elcho Island I left her and told her I would be back in a little while. That white man and his Malays had brought some gin, and I was drunk. It all seemed like a dream. I remember she cried and cried and wanted me to take her, but I said no. When we were away at sea I was sober and I said, "Where is my girl?"

They said, "You left her behind."

I said, "I must go back and get her." I was going to get up and go back, but I was told to wait and get her when we once more came back to her country. They said they were older men and understood those things better than I did. I was a fool to have left her. I was very angry with the Malay for giving me that gin. It may be that he wanted her for himself.

We went on and got to Cape Stewart, where we shot same geese with the white man's gun. Soon we reached Elcho Island. It had been so long I had forgotten it. I did not know it when I saw it, and Cape Don Tommy told me it was Elcho Island. All the people ran away when they saw us for they were afraid of the white men, and they had thought that I had been killed when I left with them before. Finally some of them back back out of the bush. They had no canoes then because the Macassar men had stopped coming and they had not yet learned how to make them from the Kalpu on

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159 the English Company Island, people who still remembered how to do it
[501] (pages 459-460). Some of the people came out to our boat by lying on a large log and paddling with their hands and feet. I got in the dinghy and went ashore with some of the people on the boat. When my mari saw me
[152] he cried and cried. Some people are like that among us black men. We cry when we meet people just as we cry sometimes when we tell them goodbye. I tried to talk to him, but I couldn't say anything. It was just the same as if I had lost my language. I had to talk to him in the sign language. I felt very foolish. I brought flour with me, but they did not know what it was.
[252] They cooked flour in paper bark just like they did palm tree flour.
[609] All the people were very angry with the white man for keeping me away so long, and some of them sneaked out in the bush and got their spears and clubs and were going to kill the white man. I said no, that it was no good. I said, "The white men talk very hard and sometimes they swear at you, but inside they are all right. Sometimes when they swear, they mean
[439] good." While we were there I got my people to make gifts of turtle shell and pearl to the white man, and he gave them hatchets and knives and calico. I got in the boat and started to go back to Port Darwin with the white man. Cape Don Tommy and the white man quarreled when we got to Croker Island because Cape Don Tommy wanted to sleep on shore. We got out at Croker Island and went by canoe to Cape Don. There I met that girl again, but her husband was there then. We went on to Port Darwin for a moon and came back to Elcho Island. Once more I went into the bush and stayed.

His Wives and Their Parents

159 581 828 825 Black men walk about single and by themselves. At first they have no mates. By and by they find one that belongs to them. By and by children come. White men walk about by themselves. By and by they find a woman, and more children come out. The Macassar man was all the same.

Big old man kangaroo walks about single and by himself. By and by he catches his woman, and then there are little kangaroos. Opossum and fly and bandicoot—they are all the same.

Python catches his mate and by and by there are eggs, then there are children. Frilled-neck lizard, native companion, honeybees, pigeon, hawk-billed turtle, and all those animals—they are just the same.

Black men cut down trees and by and by little ones come up. Everywhere and all the time it is always the same. Walk around single, by and by a mate, and by and by children. There is an inside meaning to this. Some of
159 581 828 813 825 us old men who are not fools understand. If those two Wawilak creator sisters had not done wrong in their own country and fornicated with those

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Wongar men, things would have been different. Both the men and the women were Dua. They were incestuous. It was like a brother and sister being together. Those two sisters left that country, one pregnant and the other menstruating. If they had not done this, this cycle would never have happened. Everyone and all plants and animals would have stayed single. But after the Wawilak sisters had done this they made it the law for everyone (pages 250-251). 159 581 828 773 825

When I was a small boy I walked about single. One day my gawel came to me and said, "Look at me. I am your gawel. You must give me kangaroo and turtle and spears. By and by I will give you my gatu mielk" (pages 93-98). 159 431 582 583

I gave him spears and spear-throwers, hair belts, and all kinds of food because he would give me his daughters. When I first started making presents to him for my wife, my younger brothers all helped me. By and by, when they get ready to have a wife, I shall help them make presents to their gawels. My gawel gave my father presents of spears and food, and he also gave my arndi presents because I was her son and because she is my gawel's sister.

We like our wives' fathers very much. Suppose my gawel and my father quarrel and suppose they fight. I can do nothing. I cannot help my father. I cannot help my father-in-law. I must do nothing. They are all the same to me. I must try to stop any fight. 159 606

All men try to get plenty of wakus in other countries. This is because they send presents to their gawels. They send things that aren't in this country. This country, where we are now, has no stone. Relatives here send presents to the Ritarngo country for stone spear heads. They send bamboo to the Goyder River people for it. Some others have no white clay and they send to other countries for it. Fathers-in-law and sons-in-law are the people who do this (pages 95-96). 159 431 604 606

Sometimes a no-good gawel promises his daughter to three wakus. All these "half" sons-in-law give presents to him. They all think they are going to get that girl. By and by one gets her. This means a big row. The other two want to fight this lucky one, and they always fight the father of the girl because he has been two-faced. They think this gawel maybe is a little bit crazy. Sometimes two or three boys, when they are all trying to get a girl, see that her father is no good and they all quit. 159 578 604

When a man marries a woman his father-in-law tells him to take good care of her. When a man has two daughters from his father-in-law, sometimes the old man comes and says to him, "It is better that I give your younger brother this next girl." The older brother says, "Yes, you tell him 159 584

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159 to feed her [give her to him]"; but if he is a greedy fellow he says, "No, I
584 want to keep her myself."

159 The black man's custom is different from the way white men are. A
[582] black man takes a wife when she is very young, sometimes before her
593 breasts have come. He sleeps with her, loves her, and does everything but
[826] have intercourse with her. This makes his girl want him and makes her
breasts come large and start sticking out. That is before her blood comes.
[841] When blood first comes to a woman it is after she has copulated with a man
for the first time. That is what causes it. She has blood a few more times,
and then she has a baby, and then the blood stops.

159 If my wife gave me no children, I would go to my gawel and tell him. He
587 would say, "Wait a little while and I will give you another daughter of mine
595 so that you can have children." If my wife died, my father-in-law would
give me another one right away. If he hasn't a grown daughter, he would
wait until his little one got larger and then he would give that girl to me.

159 When my second wife got large enough her father and mother brought
595 her to me and said for her to stay with me and that I was her husband
(pages 95-96). My first wife [the new wife's older sister] did not growl at
me but kept very quiet when I was around. When I was away she growled
at her little sister and told her to go on away. "Mahkarolla belongs to me
and not to you." By and by my new wife told me about this. She also told
her mother and father.

[826] They said to my first wife, "You must stop this quarreling with your
sister. She is just the same as you. You are our daughter and she is our
daughter. You have Mahkarolla for a husband, and we have given her to
him and she has him for a husband. She is your young sister. You will now
have someone to look out for the wood for you, and she can help you get
food for your husband."

My wife kept quiet then. Those two sisters live together just like good
friends. They never fight like the wives of some husbands do. They look
out for each other's children.

159 When another gawel liked me he went to my proper father-in-law and
584 said, "I like that son-in-law that belongs to you. I would like to give him
my daughter. He can be a son-in-law of mine, too." My gawel, because he
is a good man, said, "You haven't promised that girl of yours to somebody
else, have you?" If that man had said, "Yes," mine would have said, "No,
you can't because that will make trouble for my son-in-law." That man
said, "No," so my father-in-law said, "Yes."

159 My mother-in-law—I don't talk to her. I can't go close to her camp, can't
606 go pick up something close to her camp, can't take food from her. I can't
give food to her straight; I must give it through my wife. When I am

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around her I can't talk high; I must talk low. It is just the same for her. I can't look at her when we are close. If I go along a path and meet my mokul I must leave that path. I must leave that path and go another way. If I walked along a path and did not see her and accidentally touched her, her sweat would make me swell up in the groin. My sweat would do the same thing for her.

My mother-in-law is a very good woman. I like her very much. She is very good to me. She always saves all the tobacco she gets and keeps it for me when I have no more. I always send her the best of the kangaroos I kill and the turtles I spear. She always says nice things about me to other people. I hear them and it makes me feel good. When my mokul gets a little bit old and she can't have any more children and she looks a little like a man and has hair on her face, then I can talk to her and she can talk to me. We must be very serious when we do this (pages 101-103).

I like my mother's mother [mari] very much. I like her best of all. She is more my mother than my own mother. When I was little, she looked out for me more than my own mother. She gave me plenty of food. She carried me when I was a baby. I like my mother's sister next best, then my mother. My mother's sister was very good to me, too (pages 96-98).

My true father died when I was small. My mother and we children went to my father's yukiyuko [younger brother], as is the law of our people.

Having an old woman for a wife is no good. She can't have a baby. She is too old. If a man doesn't have children he won't have any sons and daughters-in-law, and he, when he is old, won't have any food and plenty of spears and plenty of tobacco. It is no good having an old woman. She is all the same as rubbish.

My wife is not like that—she is young. She is a very good woman. She always looks straight ahead and keeps her mouth very still when she is around other men. She never talks loud. Sometimes, when I am away too long, she won't give me food when I come back. She thinks I have been away too long. When she does this I sit down and wait a while and say nothing. It is better to keep quiet. Then I say, "Well, what are you mad about?" She says nothing, and her face looks different. I can see by how her heart is beating that she is wild inside. I keep asking and asking. Then she tells me she thinks maybe I have stayed away a long time and have been with some other woman. She thinks maybe I haven't been hunting and I have been fooling her. Clear inside she knows this is not true, and by and by she gets quiet and gives me something to eat. Sometimes she thinks when I have been away that I have an old sweetheart and that I go out all the time to see her. After she has growled for a long time I say nothing and then I say, "No, I have no sweetheart. If I did have I would come and tell

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159 you. You're not a man." This makes her quiet. I think sometimes if I did
593 have a sweetheart I wouldn't tell her, because none of the other men do
[837] when they have them.

159 When I was a young man, women were more careful and better than
837 they are now. My brother, Badunga, is just starting to grow a mustache. This no-good woman we call the Mokoi [evil ghost] has already tried to seduce him. My brother was out hunting the other day with some other boys, and when he was a little bit away from them that Mokoi woman saw him. She was getting shells, away from the rest of the women. She is no longer a young woman. She has no children because she has copulated with too many men who were not her husbands. She sneaked up on him and talked very nice to him, but my brother Badunga did nothing and came away. He was afraid, and besides he did not like the woman.

159 Badunga told me. I went down to her husband's camp and told him.
684 I called that Mokoi out and gave her a very hard beating. Her husband, who is my "half-father," did nothing. When I had finished he took a spear-thrower and started beating her too. All the people in the camp said that was very good and was what she needed.

159 Women before were different. They sat down more quiet than they do
837 now. This one, who is now Dimala's wife, who used to be my sweetheart when I was a young boy, seduced one of the Ritarngo boys. He is too young. I said, "I don't know what is the matter with you women now. You are going after younger and younger boys all the time for sweethearts. I shall have to watch Mari-ma-leen and Pulli [his 18-months-old son and three-year-old boy], or you will have them out too. You are ruining our young men because you are teaching them to have too many women who don't belong to them. They won't sit quiet with their own wives when they have them because you women teach them another way. When we old men [836] were young, a man had one sweetheart and no more until he was married and had proper wives of his own."

159 If the sweetheart I had a long time ago would come to me now and
572 ask for food I must give it to her. I would not have sexual relations with
837 her now, because I am a married man and that would be wrong. When I go to her camp she gives me food. Her husband is a good man; he says to that woman, "Give Mahkarolla some food. He used to be your sweetheart." If he were no good and jealous, he would growl at the woman and tell her not to give me anything to eat. I haven't any sweethearts now. Dimala's wife used to be my sweetheart a long time ago. She likes me very much now. Sometimes she comes around and wants me to go out to the bush with her but I say, "No, I've got a wife. I have children." I will not "play" with another woman. I would get a baby (pages 74-92).

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Sometimes a man and a woman run away because they like each other too much. This is a bad thing. Marriages should be arranged properly and people should do things that we do here when things are right. No one here likes runaway marriages. When people like each other too much it always makes trouble for all their relatives and for them (pages 86-88).

Some women stay no good. A man can give them a good hiding and what do they do? They go straight away and look for a new sweetheart. They are all the same as someone with an evil spirit in their heads.

HIS CHILDREN

When my son was born, I was very happy. Many moons before I had come back from a Djungguan python dance. I went to sleep by my campfire and had a dream. In the dream the spirit child came to me and said, "I am bringing something from Wongar to you. I am looking for my mother." I said to him, "Where do you come from?"

He said, "I came from your totem well. I am bringing a barrimundi fish for you" (pages 67-69).

I got up and walked around in the morning time. I went down close to the water along the beach. I saw a large barrimundi floating on the water. When he came close up, the tide threw this fish right up on the sand bank. I looked at him. His tail was moving. I thought quickly, "Oh, this one is from that dream." That fish was all the same as dead when I came up close. I took my spear-thrower, hooked it inside his mouth, and pulled him all the way along through the water and carried him back to camp. I left him there. I called out to a man. "You come help me," I said. "Come help carry this fish and get a fire ready."

The man said, "You lift him up yourself."

I said, "No, he is too big for me."

We two carried the barrimundi back to camp. We cooked him. One man cooked the liver and tasted it. He said, "It is very sweet and very fat but tastes very different."

I said, "Yes, it is different. I dreamed this one."

We started next day for a ceremony. We danced all night. We danced for over a moon.

Before my daughter came I did not dream at first. One day I was out hunting turtles. I saw a little bird. It was like a little fish in the sea. The little bird flew on one side of me and then the other. I heard him say, "Wheel! Wheel!" It was all the same as the wind in the trees. I thought then, "This is a spirit after me." I went ashore. I slept and I dreamed. This little bird came to me in the dream and said, "Father, I have come to you. Where is my mother?"

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159 I said, "Your mother is here alongside of me." Her mother had not had
787 children yet. We had no family. She was only a young girl. I awakened my
842 wife and told her my dream, for I thought straightaway, "I am going to have a daughter." I said to her, "I dreamed a girl for you." My wife knew then she was going to have a daughter.

After my daughter was born we knew we were going to have a son because I dreamed a son. One moon went by. My wife felt a little bit heavy. She told me. I said, "Yes, that is what I told you before in the dream." A few months later a son was born.

159 I like my children. If a father and mother do not take care of their sons
593 and daughters all the women everywhere start gossiping about them. They
626 say that they are crazy, that maybe they have an evil spirit in their heads,
855 and they say they are no good. We men talk the same way, too. We do not like to see little children mistreated. My little son is just the same as my
159 spear-thrower. He is just the same as my right arm (page 71). I think
842 it is a good thing for a man to have a lot of children. It makes a lot of
593 people in his tribe. It always gives him, when he gets old, all the things he wants to eat and use for himself. If he has trouble, and all men have trouble, he does not have to go to his mother's people or his wife's people for help. He has it himself. He can take his own sons and fight any people because he is strong. When a man has no sons and no daughters, then when he gets old he can do nothing. We black men like daughters too because when they marry that gives us many wakus and makes us very strong. Good sons-in-law always make many gifts. Good wakus make men proud. We like sons too because nobody can hurt us.

159 Sometimes people talk out loud in the camp at night, and they say,
582 "Which one did you promise this daughter of yours to?"

I say, "I don't know." I say, "No one." I say, "If I have a sister and she has a son I can't wait any longer then. I must point at that waku [sister's son and son-in-law]. He must get her. But now I must keep quiet. I can't say anything. My sister has no son and I must wait. My little boy's mother has a brother; by and by when he has a daughter, I must go to him and get that girl for my son. That will make everything right and keep our family straight" (pages 65-67).

Mahkarolla as a Friend and a Murngin

000 Those who believe that the savage has a prerational mentality have not known natives intimately, either because of not being in contact with them or because of the mental barrier of scientific or religious dogma. The larger ideas and more general concepts of primitive people are much the same as our own. They have their philosophers and thinkers, their fools and their

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ordinary men, in about the same proportion as we do. However, no matter how much we like natives and their culture, there is always a tendency to assume an ethnic superiority and to look upon a "primitive" man as "just like a child." This assumed mental superiority is part of our thinking and difficult to dislodge.

A "council" of the important old men had gathered under a large tamarind tree on the border of the totem grounds (page 31). Mahkarolla, as one of the older and more important men of the Murngin, had a place in the circle. [I was also present.] The members of this council were discussing the perplexities of the great war in which their various clans were involved. A few months before there had been complete quiet. In the whole of northern Arnhem Land there had been peace. All the old blood feuds were quiet and inactive. The great ceremony to celebrate the recognition of Yurlunggur, the python god, had started. Leaders from the upper reaches of the Roper River had come down to the coastal plains of the Arafura Sea for this great fertility rite.

One night two young men, against the wishes of their elders, killed a boy and wounded another who belonged to clans that had been their traditional enemies. In the early morning the bush people gathered their belongings and hurried back to their own country. The younger men of all the clans of the Murngin and the other tribes made new spears and tested their spear-throwers in preparation for trouble. War started. The ceremonies ceased. Many battles were fought and many people were killed (pages 172-174).

The ceremony which had been interrupted was a fertility rite. Without this celebration to help nature perform her many functions, the animals would not multiply, the grass would not grow, and the seasons of the year would lose their symmetry. The absolute necessity for the celebration of this ritual was felt by all the men who had accepted the responsibilities of Murngin society.

The council had met, therefore, to find ways of stopping the war and of bringing peace to all the clans of the black world as they knew it. The war must be stopped if life were to continue.

The causes of the war were considered in the effort to find a solution which would bring peace to the people. The reasons for the failure of the peace-making ceremonies were considered. Blame was attached to various individuals. The old men criticized especially the hot-headedness of their youths, with slightly more emotion expressed when they spoke of the misdeeds of their enemies' young men.

After several hours of talk consensus was reached. It was felt that the warlike peoples of the bush were really responsible for the trouble. It was

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623 clearly seen that those not represented at the conference were the real insti-
628 gators of the war and that their actions were without tribal sanction.

[202] One old man then suggested sending a messenger with a message stick to the bushmen, who were not represented, to tell them that there would be a great makarata or peace-making ceremony (pages 174-176). Someone replied that this was foolishness for makaratas had been tried and they had failed because the enemies violated the rules. Instead of bringing peace the makaratas had only brought more trouble and greater conflict. Discussion of this point finally brought victory to the one who opposed the makaratas because the antagonism of the coastal people against the inland clans was still very strong and they wanted vengeance as well as peace.

What, then, could be done to stop the fighting? The situation was desperate; drastic efforts must be made. One of the older men said, "Let us stop all war. This killing of our young men is no good. It is better that we have ceremonies all the time and never have war. Let us have a gaingar."

Everyone agreed he was right. The speaker continued, "We will have a spear fight to end all spear fights."

A gaingar is the most deadly form of Murngin warfare. Later I learned that 17 men had been killed in one gaingar. In proportion to the population this meant a higher mortality rate than in all of the battles of World War I. This old man was proposing that today's young men be sacrificed so that the young men of tomorrow could be saved.

I was asked what I thought of the idea. I did not respond for it was too much. I sat there, among a council of the wisest men of a Stone Age culture. In one sense several millenniums separated their civilization from mine. Yet I had been a soldier in a war in which our leaders and those of our allies had said, "This is a war to end all wars," and had sent millions of young men to die with this rallying cry.

The discussion continued. Most of the group were enthusiastically in favor of the gaingar. The minority, Mahkarolla among them, grudgingly agreed.

When the meeting disbanded Mahkarolla and I walked back to my camp. "When I was a boy I saw a spear fight to end all spear fights," he said. "Many men were killed. It was no good. We must not have it. My people did not stop fighting. As you see, we are fighting today just as we did before. Spear fights do not end spear fights."

159 One day Mahkarolla and I started on an expedition with two canoeloads
502 of Murngin men, I to map clan territories, he to visit the sacred pools where
E121 his totems lived. As we sailed in the dugout around the rocky cliffs of
784 Point Napier, across the channel from the English Company Islands, we
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entered almost open sea where the wind sweeps down from the northeast and Cape Wessel with terrific force. The western side of Napier's Peninsula was quiet and calm, but the moment we rounded the point we entered a heavy, stormy sea. To go back would have risked being dashed to pieces against the rocky cliffs of the point; we had to go on—across many miles of open sea.

Mahkarolla was in my canoe. Each canoe was equipped with a small sail and a paddle used as a rudder. Along the sides the men used paddles to steady the canoe and keep it from tipping over. The dugout canoes with no outriggers that are constructed by the natives of North Australia are unwieldy and easily upset even in calm water.

As the storm increased Mahkarolla became anxious and asked his older brother, Charli Charli Sit-Down, to act as steersman. In spite of his broken back he was probably the best canoeman in North Australia. He was entirely dependent upon the water for long distance traveling and had become an excellent sailor. Mahkarolla distributed the other men about the boat and took charge of the sail. He placed me in the center in front of Charli Charli.

I thought the waves would submerge us or dash up against the rocks, but the little canoe rose slowly over them and plunged into the troughs beyond. Sometimes the waves were so high that we could not see the sail of the other canoe. Finally, I suggested to Charli Charli that we go back. He shook his head and pointed to the rocks, indicating with a gesture that we would be swamped and killed.

The wind and waves were increasing. One man bailed furiously with a bivalve shell, for although the waves did not strike us the heavy spray filled our canoe. The natives mumbled to themselves. They were calling on their totem ancestors and their totems to help them. I said nothing and looked straight ahead. Then I started to swear in native at the storm. Charli Charli tapped me on the shoulder and asked me to stop because I would offend the Great Serpent and he might swallow us.

In gripping the gunwales I had one hand underwater. Charli Charli again tapped my shoulder and shook his head. He pointed to my hand and said, "Bult-main-dji" (gray shark). I pulled my hand out of the water and turned it so that the fingers were inside the boat. The day before our canoe had been struck several times by large sharks which had come to prey on a crocodile we had harpooned.

We sailed on. We had lost sight of the other canoe and wondered whether it had sunk or gone back. The wind increased and the waves rose higher and higher. We took down the sail because it was no longer possible to control it. It seemed only a matter of minutes before one of the waves would strike us and sink us all.

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I called to Mahkarolla, "What shall we do?" He said nothing. He did not so much as glance back. I called his name. He paid no attention. I wondered if he were sulking. This seemed unlike him, but most Murngin occasionally sulk and I wondered if he might feel that I had brought him into this very dangerous situation and blame me for it. With the foolish hope that it might be possible for us to get back to safety, I yelled again and asked if it were necessary for us to go on. He ignored me. After several more futile attempts to get his attention and some profane comment I subsided. There was complete silence in the boat.

Hours went by. Everyone remained quiet. I felt isolated and alone. The sun had gone down behind a bank of red clouds. In many of the Murngin ceremonies red clouds are a symbol of the end of things. The sea had turned blood red, ugly and morbid.

Darkness came, and with the night the waves quieted and the wind lessened. About midnight we came to a desert island lying a few hundred yards off the shore. The island was formed like a semicircular hill with one small beach at the bend. We saw a campfire on the beach and were afraid to land because the coastal and bush peoples had been fighting. Marauding bands from the interior had been coming down to the coastal country. We drew closer and discovered the party to be Murngin—the other canoe had landed safely.

Everything I had with me was soaked through except my camera and photographic material which, fortunately, were in waterproof bags. Mahkarolla and I with the others sat by the fire to dry and warm ourselves. We dried out enough tobacco to have a smoke. Mahkarolla turned to me and then said, "I am very sorry I did not answer you when you called to me, Bungawa. I could not because I was crying too much. I was afraid you were going to lose your life. I thought those waves were going to tip our canoe over and you would die. I am very sorry."

I tried to answer him. All my words seemed inadequate. However, even in my shame I knew he understood my feelings because he had once said that when white men swore they did not mean what they said. After we had had some food and what little water was left in my canteen we hovered around the fire and went to sleep.

When I left the Murngin country I took the mission lugger from the Crocodile Islands to Port Darwin to get the boat to Sydney. Mahkarolla came with me. I had to wait ten days for the boat and during this time he and I were together a good part of each day. When the boat came in Mahkarolla helped me aboard with my luggage and scientific equipment. Then my white friends in Darwin came aboard for a farewell whiskey and

10: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1958
OI17 Murngin OI17

soda. Natives were not allowed to stay on board. When I realized we were about to sail I rushed out to find Mahkarolla. The pier was filled with Darwin whites who were there to feel in touch with the homeland. Out at the far corner of the crowd I saw Mahkarolla. He was standing still, his head bent down. I waved but he did not reply. I called to him but received no answer. There came to my mind the memory of the storm at sea when he thought I was going to lose my life. Our parting now had death in it, too, because it was certain that we would never see each other again. I hurried down to the other end of the boat to be nearer him to try to attract his attention. The whisle blew and we started to leave the pier. I called again. Mahkarolla looked up, waved, then lowered his head again. He was crying. That was the last time I saw him.